

Othona Community, Bradwell Centre Committee (BCC)

Minutes of meeting, Monday 7th November 2022

Attending: Steve Barnes, Geraldine O'Grady, Debbie and Richard Sanders, Nicholas Mannoukas, Susanne Kelly, Clare Stone, Chris Jones and Mary Grimson joined a little later. Phil Martin also attended.

Apologies: Simon Thomson, Sasha East, Chris Jones, Mary Grimson

Welcome and prayer

Richard led the opening prayer. Steve apologised that he hadn't looked at alternative dates even though Simon had said, two months previous, that he was unable to attend on this date. Chris Jones is considering joining as a link trustee. Clare Gough is currently providing line management for Richard and Debbie.

People

Debbie reported on the situation at the centre. It has been non-stop and additional staffing is needed. There are two Workaway volunteers currently which is a help, but these tend to be short term placements. Three month long placements work better. The housekeeper and trainee Christian hospitality positions have been re-advertised as there had not been a good response so far, but it was early days. Chris Bliss has been volunteering for a while and hopefully will stay on for the time being. Pete Baird currently is working on the site one day per week.

Steve asked if the BCC could help with any aspect of the recruitment process. **Debbie said feedback on the adverts would be helpful and suggestions of where to put it would be welcomed.** Chris Jones suggested offering placements for catering students from a local college. The advert has gone on a local volunteering site. Chris referred to the need to replace the septic tank/reed beds system. He is investigating how to approach this and will approach a local organisation who may be able to advise. Malcolm (Hardy) and Jonney have been working on this. Richard explained the issue with leakage between the two chambers causing clogging in the reedbeds, meaning the pond is not as clean as it should be. The system is getting too old and installation of a proper waste treatment unit is likely to be the only solution in the end.

Accommodation

Core accommodation is adequate at the moment but could be a problem when two or more core members are recruited. Originally there was a kitchen in the core block but it was never used so it was converted into more accommodation. Susanne thinks space could be taken from the corridor to put in a sink and a cooker. Alternatively could convert the north facing green room into a small kitchen. It is hard to plan this without knowing what the needs of the future core will be. The space is fine for a single person but not great for a couple. It may be best to wait and see who turns up before deciding how to use this space. Water supply and drainage are the tricky elements.

Programme planning

Winterwatch, the 'If Only' charity booking, and Advent weekend were all coming up. There is a lot on and it is challenging for staff to manage to get days off, especially those under pressure with supporting family members and undertaking caring responsibilities. It is essential to recruit more core members to ensure there is enough cover and enable enough time off. The recruitment advert has been posted with Oscar, theological colleges and other places. Gail Dell may be able to provide contacts with the

Bruderhoff to see about hosting volunteers from there. There may be two French volunteers coming through VAP, but this is not as good as the previous scheme.

Programme

What worked/didn't work during past 6 months? There had been a meeting in the summer during which a draft programme was started - this is work in progress, but needs a bit of strengthening. The Green Weekend worked well last year and will be repeated next year, Spring Watch, run by Hugh and Nastasja, and the summer went really well, there was great feedback, especially for all the team running the centre. YMCA residentials are going very well. The Alcoholics Anonymous group loved their stay and will book again. The group bookings are going well. Often these groups do not need too much input in terms of facilitation, compared to community weeks. Mealtimes etc are agreed beforehand and things like washing up are shared. Chapel services are incorporated where appropriate, depending on the group. Forthcoming attractions include Winter Watch, Christmas and other events.

Pricing structure

Othona WD have found some weeks are not getting enough people. Debbie is wary about increasing prices, especially as it would be good to attract more families. Single person supplements are being considered. During the summer there were times when there were not enough rooms due to people not sharing. This will be further considered. Offering a reduction to those willing to share may be a good incentive.

Development

Richard looks forward to working with 'development' trustee John Smith. In the summer there was interest expressed in forming a sub-group to work on development. Susanne, Trevor Darley and Mick Crowe had expressed an interest. Richard would need to be a part of that. Next steps will be looked at once there had been a chance to discuss with John. Both centres need a lot of development work to keep them going. The sub-group will focus on prioritising and costing what needs to be done. Susanne is looking into how to improve the accessible shower room. The Motley building roof and windows may need to be replaced in the near future. It is challenging to find appropriately skilled people who are willing to take on small jobs at the moment. The very dry summer has caused movement and subsidence around the site due to the clay soil. The footings of the lower field building need to be reviewed – it may be possible to jack it up and adjust the pilings. Susanne and others will prioritise this at the next working weekend.

Wind turbine update

Richard reported that Natural England and others had left some unhelpful responses, with regard to the visual impact on the Chapel and use of a nearby footpath. The Council has not made a decision about the planning permission yet.

11 acres

The involvement with A Rocha has brought a lot of very interesting contacts. While there is not sufficient manpower currently to do very much at the moment, the land has been useful for camping over the summer. Developments such as a willow labyrinth and firepit circle are being considered, and other areas may be rewilded.

Priority list of maintenance and improvements

The badger's set has been removed from the seawall, which had been severely compromised.

In the Motley building much of the double glazing, especially in the bedrooms, has blown and needs replacing. The triangular sky lights need attention/replacement. The shower rooms in the solar building need attention.

Money

Richard ran through the main points of the current finances. On the income side we are £36k up. Donations are up. EVS receipts are yet to come in. On expenditure, we are £6.5K under budget at the moment and it is expected that the net profit line will be substantially above what was budgeted for.

Concerns and predictions for 2023

The biggest challenge currently is recruiting enough staff. As inflation will lead to increased costs on food, fuel etc, on top of people facing a drop in income, the financial surplus should be kept by to help get through the next two years. Wood pellets have gone up in price by about £20%. People may be holidaying at home more, which could be good, but then a week at Othona can cost a comparable amount to a package holiday abroad. More effort could be put into legacy fundraising, following OWD's example.

Membership

Phil Martin is now membership secretary. Recently joined Trustees may not yet have thought through the implications of the membership issue. Membership helps with targeting for fundraising. Phil's paper clarifies the current position and outlines next steps. The paper will go to Trustees next week. Steve thanked Phil for all his work on this. The Nails are not mentioned in the paper, but will come out through this piece of work. Encouragement of people to become members has fallen by the wayside. Some are not aware if they are paid up members or not. This work will help to draw people in to become more involved and more consciously aware of their membership. It would be good to have a 'Here is how you get more involved' section on the website. Chris noted that this had been discussed a lot during his earlier time on the committee. People's membership comes from what they can give, not what they can get. The centre managers have to accept what people can contribute, while having to run the centre, which can be a big challenge, but allowing people to contribute and be engaged is essential. Debbie and Richard are walking that tightrope well!

ACTION: All to give feedback/suggestions to help with recruitment

Nicholas will liaise with Debbie on programme planning. Other than mid-week and winter next year most of the year is already fully programmed. Funding has been applied for to run The Green Festival weekend. This is in the diary and will go ahead. There is talk of a Pilgrimage weekend incorporating an event called Cedd-fest, with bands etc, focused on the Chapel, St Cedd, and the community.

The next meeting will be in February 2023. Geraldine will send suggested dates around.

Blessings and farewell

The meeting was closed